

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
/SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3070

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, US
SUBJECT: ORTHODOX PATRIARCH FEARS PARTITION OF LEBANON IF
GREATER PRESSURE NOT BROUGHT TO BEAR ON KFUR FRONT

SUMMARY: GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH ELIAS IV FEARS BACKLASH
AMONG LEBANESE MUSLIMS IF KFUR FRONT IS PERMITTED TO PURSUE
ITX EXTREMIST POLICIES. HE BELIEVES SARKIS UNABLE TO
CONTROL KFUR AND BROADLY HINTS THAT USG SHOULD PLAY ROLE
BOTH IN COUNSELLING MODERATION ON MARONITE EXTREMISTS AND
HELPING CREATE A COUNTER-MOVEMENT TO THE KFUR. OTHERWISE,
WE CAN EXPECT SEE BIRTH OF AN EXTREMIST MUSLIM COUNTER-
MOVEMENT.

1. CALLED ON ORTHODOX PATRIARCH ELIAS IV AND HIS AIDE
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BISHOP RAMLAOUI WITH EMBOFF MAY 13, DAY FOLLOWING PATRIARCH'S
RETURN FROM LEBANON WHERE HE HAD HELD DISCUSSION WITH
SARKIS, BUTROS, AND FORMER PRIMIN TAKIEDDIN AL-SULH.
PATRIARCH HEADS LARGEST CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION IN LEVANT,
SECOND LARGEST IN LEBANON AFTER MARONITES.

2. PATRIARCH EXPRESSED PARTICULAR CONCERN THAT EXTREMIST

ATTITUDES OF KFUR FRONT WOULD SOON PRODUCE BACKLASH AMONG LEBANESE MUSLIMS. SULH HAD EXPRESSED FEAR THAT WITH MUSLIM LEADERSHIP IN DISARRAY AND NO LONGER ABLE EXERT ITS FORMER AUTHORITY, ORDINARY MUSLIMS WOULD EVENTUALLY TAKE TO STREETS TO PROTEST WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS MARONITE INTENTION TO EITHER RULE COUNTRY OR PARTITION IT. SULH IMPLIED THAT SYRIANS WERE CURRENTLY LEANING TOO HEAVILY ON WEST BEIRUT AND MUSLIM/LEFTIST AREAS WHILE PERMITTING CHRISTIANS TO RUN EAST BEIRUT AND OTHER CHRISTIAN AREAS ALMOST UNHINDERED.

3. SARKIS HAD INDICATED TO PATRIARCH THAT HIS LEBANESE OPPOSITION COMES ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FROM HIS FELLOW MARONITES WHILE POLITICIANS FROM MOST OTHER CHRISTIAN SECTS AND MUSLIMS WHO VISIT HIM ARE QUICK TO PLEDGE THEIR SUPPORT TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. PATRIARCH BELIEVES VIRTUAL PARTITION NOW EXISTS WITH BACHIR GEMAYIL AND OTHERS INSISTING ON SEPARATE UNIVERSITIES, AIRPORTS, COMMUNICATION FACILITIES, AND PORTS. KISRAWANIS IN THEIR EXCLUSIVE MARONITE ENCLAVE, ARE TRYING TO IMPOSE THEIR WILL ON ENTIRE COUNTRY AND UNGRATEFUL TO SYRIANS FOR SUPPORT DAMASCUS EXTENDED THEM WHEN THEY WERE THREATENED WITH DEFEAT. HE BELIEVED MARONITE LEADERS FAILED TO RECOGNIZE THAT SUNNIS ARE AS OPPOSED TO SYRIAN DOMINATION OF COUNTRY AS THEY.

4. PATRIARCH AND BISHOP BOTH BELIEVE THAT RIGHT-WING MARONITES HAVE LOST THEIR PERSPECTIVE AND SHOULD BE COUNTERED BY ANOTHER FRONT WHICH COULD BRING THEM TO SEE NEED TO COOPERATE WITH OTHER GROUPS WITHIN THE COUNTRY. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT SARKIS NOT RECEIVING MORE HELP
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IN COMBATING THESE SEPARATIST TENDENCIES. PATRIARCH CLAIMED MANY DIVERSE GROUPS AND SECTS, INCLUDING SOME MARONITES, WOULD BE READY TO JOIN FORCES TO ATTEMPT TO BALANCE CURRENT MARONITE DOMINANCE OF POWER IN LEBANESE INTERNAL POLITICS AS MEANS OF FORESTALLING BIRTH OF MORE EXTREME COUNTER-MOVEMENT, WHICH WOULD INEVITABLY SPRING UP AMONG MUSLIMS IF PRESENT DRIFT OF EVENTS CONTINUED. THEY ASSERTED THAT CURRENT SYRIAN POLICIES WERE INTIMIDATING COALESCENCE OF ANTI-KFUR FORCES AND WERE SOMEWHAT PERPLEXED AT SARG'S FAILURE TO THUS FAR TAKE STRONGER STAND TOWARDS INDIVIDUAL GROUPS,

PARTICULARLY CHAMOUN. THEY SUSPECTED THAT SARG FEARED GETTING FURTHER BOGGED DOWN IN LEBANESE INTERNAL POLITICS AND THAT "SOMEONE ELSE" THEREFORE HAD TO TAKE MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN RESTRAINING KFUR LEADERS THROUGH ENCOURAGING FORMATION MODERATE GROUPING. THIS WOULD GREATLY HELP ELECTED GOVERNMENT TO GOVERN COUNTRY.

5. I POINTED OUT TO THEM THAT IN AMBASSADOR PARKER'S FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH LEADING MARONITE POLITICIANS, AND THEIR SONS, HE CONSISTENTLY ARGUED THE NEED FOR GREATER SUPPORT FOR SARKIS AND DISCOURAGED ANY MOVE TOWARDS PARTITION. PATRIARCH, HOWEVER, INDICATED THAT HE BELIEVED STRONGER US WARNINGS AND, BY IMPLICATION FINANCING, NECESSARY IF RIGHTISTS WERE TO BE DETERRED FROM THEIR PRESENT COURSE.

6. COMMENT: MESSAGE, HEAVILY CLOAKED AS IT WAS IN PATRIARCHIAL ELOQUENCE, SEEMED TO BE THAT ONLY US ENJOYED SUFFICIENT STANDING WITH VARIOUS PARTIES TO PLAY ROLE OF RESTRAINING KFUR AND STIMULATING COUNTER-MOVEMENT. PATRIARCH, WHO WILL BE LEAVING FOR THREE MONTH TRIP TO US, CANADA AND MEXICO ON MAY 18, HEADS THE REGION'S CHRISTIAN SECT WITH THE TRADITIONALLY STRONGEST ARAB NATIONALIST ORIENTATION. HE IS KNOWN TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH PRES. AL-ASSAD AND HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON. THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ORTHODOX, WHO HAVE WIDE-SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL BELIEFS AND WERE BE FOUND ON BOTH SIDES OF LINES DURING CIVIL WAR, HAVE NONE OF THEIR COHESION WHICH CHARACTERIZES MARONITES AND DRUZE. THEIR ABILITY TO COEXIST AND EVEN FLOUSISH WHILE LIVING AMONG MUSLIMS HAVE EARNED THEM THE MISTRUST OF MORE EXTREME MARONITES. IT WIJALIDLEY BELIEVED THAT MARONITES FROM ZGHORTA SACKED PRINCIPAL ORTHODOX SEMINARY WHICH IN LEBANON, BALAMAND, OF ALL ITS PRICELESS ICONS AND ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS. (CHURST HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN ASKED FOR \$5 MILLION RANSOM FOR THEIR RETURN.)

7. WHILE PATRIARCH CAN HARDLY SPEAK FOR ALL ORTHODOX (AFTER ALL CHARLES MALIK, FUAD BUTROS, AND GEORGE HABASH ARE ALSO ORTHODOX), HIS VIEWS DO REFLECT CONCERN MANY NON-MARONITE CHRISTIANS IN AREA SHARE THAT MARONITES WILL PUST TO CREATE THEIR OWN STATE AT EXPENSE OF ALL OTHER CHRISTIAN SECTS WHO WILL THEN SUFFER MUSLIM BACKLASH. WHILE PATRIARCH'S FEARS MAY HAVE BEEN OVERDRAWN, THEY ARE REAL AND PERHAPS MORE WIDELY SHARED THAN WAS THE CASE SEVERAL MONTHS AGO.
MURPHY

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